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Class: 314

"Crying is a sign of weakness," my grandmother intoned when I fell and my face instinctively puckered up to cry. This is a childhood memory dredged up from a long time ago, a memory deeply ingrained in my mind. As I grew older, this statement became my personal philosophy to live by. This statement was so significant to me then because it was my grandmother who taught me this, and I had never ever seen my grandmother drop a tear; or at least I thought so, till she taught me better – she taught me the real meaning of bravery.

My grandmother turns seventy-four this year. She is in her first month of remission from breast cancer. It was a blow for my entire family four months ago when her physician revealed that she was at the second-stage of her cancer and chemotherapy was imperative to save her life. What culminated was an intensive flood of mental anguish and physical pain on my grandmother's part. We only saw the side effects of chemotherapy as the weeks passed; thinning hair, nosebleeds, sunken eyes; yet we could only imagine the pain, for my grandmother never let loose one whimper or tear.

My grandmother had to go for fortnightly chemotherapy sessions at the hospital and my family and I accompanied her there. While everyone followed my grandmother into the room to give her support, I stayed outside. Was I a selfish coward for doing so? What I do know is the greatest reason for not stepping into the room was because I was afraid, terribly afraid of seeing my grandmother cry. My perspectives in life were centered wholly on the fragile fact that she did not cry; what would happen then if I found out that I was living a lie all along? I was afraid of facing the unknown. Yet, just like how contradictory humans can be, I involuntarily began to question this personal belief of mine. Am I, after so many years of trying not to cry, ultimately just a weakling for not daring to do so?

It was cause for celebration when the six-week chemotherapy was over. Knowing that there would be no chemotherapy then, I followed my grandmother into the physician's room during her last consultation. To our disbelief, the physician dropped a bombshell by proposing that my grandmother undergo another intensive 8-week course of chemotherapy for preventive measures. There was a stunned silence, and without any warning whatsoever, my grandmother burst into tears. She talked about how she hated chemotherapy and the pain that ensued, she talked about how she hated how the hairs on her pillow were a daily reminder of her pain, she hated how even talking was exhausting and how sometimes she just wanted to give up. Most of all, she was afraid, that one day, she would not be brave enough to endure another day of pain and that she would die. It was plain, heartrending crying that made me want to hug my grandmother and cry, and that was what I did; two people, locked in a shared embrace, love being the common language shared between that hug.

My grandmother never took that second course of chemotherapy. She is now hale and healthy, and has brighter perspective of life. My perspective has changed too, for from that hug, I understood, not in words but from the heart, that crying was not a sign a weakness. My grandmother, who had gone through all that pain and agony, all that anguish and torment alone without giving up, who could ever say she is weak? Crying is a sign of bravery for we accept that we are human, we are not infallible. I learnt that on the day my grandmother cried, it was alright to cry when we are afraid.

Crying is not a sign of weakness...this I believe.